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# Fugitives, family, fortune seekers and franchisees

## Towards understanding foreign criminal actors in Africa

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### Summary

Foreign criminals are a significant presence in Africa. Four typologies of foreign criminal actors are identified, allowing an exploration into why some actors develop more successful criminal enterprises than others. Success appears to be the result of a slow embedment in the local criminal economy, avoiding displays of wealth and the targeted corruption of officials. It also depends on the expansion of ethnic networks where high levels of trust or coercion of members prevent law enforcement penetration. Eroding these successful criminal operations requires an ability to disrupt recruitment into the networks and ultimately their more effective integration into legitimate economic activities.

### Recommendations

- Integrate local diaspora populations more effectively, bolstering critical leadership and other voices against the involvement of individuals in criminal networks.
- Focus on reducing corruption at e.g. ports, customs, national parks and in the police, to eliminate government links in criminal chains.
- Support independent journalism and civil society activity, including within diaspora communities, as a critical inoculator against the embedment of criminal groups.
- State actors should work together to identify new arrivals early, incentivise them away from network recruitment, and not immediately criminalise them. This could see the franchisee model die on the vine.

## Introduction: 'dark commerce' in Africa

How organised crime grows, develops and spreads from one place in the world to another has long been a thorny subject of analysis and debate. Organised crime began to extend beyond the confines of its original domestic roots at around the same time as globalisation of the world's licit economies occurred in the 1990s. Such accounts feature regularly in media stories. This is perhaps most readily represented by the appearance of mafia-style figures in foreign climes. (Such stories generally ignore an earlier phase of mafia movement in the 1920s and 1930s, most prominently from Italy to the United States.)

In these discussions, foreign criminal actors are often stereotyped as part of a broader undercurrent of xenophobic narratives and blamed for increases in crime in their newly adopted countries. The case of Africa is no exception.<sup>1</sup>

The veracity and integrity of such criminal-expatriate accounts, however, have been challenged in scholarly literature, most notably in the work of criminologist Federico Varese.<sup>2</sup> 'Many policy makers and some academics,' argues Varese in a recent study, 'believe that mafias move easily between countries and with little difficulty quickly become deeply rooted. The reality is more complex.'<sup>3</sup> Although Varese's focus is traditional mafias, the same point could be made in respect of criminal transplantation more generally.

### We need to interrogate polarised narratives about whether foreigners or locals drive criminal markets

The popular (mis)conception that in Africa high-level foreign criminals are also responsible for driving the spread of crime is evident in discussions that point to foreigners, from other African countries and outside the continent, as the source of organised criminal activity. Reporting on non-African foreign criminals and criminal groups often directly or indirectly implies that Africa, given its resources and potential for illegal transactions, is a 'target' for foreign criminal operations.

In one recent example, a report by the respected Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) concluded that Vietnamese criminal groups were 'driving unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, exacerbating crime and corruption and exploiting weak governance and local communities along the supply and transport chain in Africa.'<sup>4</sup>

Such findings underscore that foreign criminal networks remain a challenge, but also that we need to interrogate polarised narratives about whether foreigners or locals drive criminal markets. By so doing we can analyse more closely how external criminal actors may influence the local illicit ecosystem in Africa, and what the response might be.

This paper therefore explores the movement of foreign criminal groups and actors to Africa and examines how successful they have been in pursuing criminal activities on the continent – what could be termed their 'embedment'. 'Embedment' in this context means long-term and successful establishment of their activities. There has been little detailed analysis on this from an African perspective, and this paper attempts to fill that gap.

One of the recurring assumptions in this debate is that criminal actors and groups have expanded as a result of well-thought-through strategies – much in the same vein as strategies attributed to private sector companies. In fact, parallels are often drawn between the investment strategies of commercial corporations and those of criminal entities in phrases like 'dark commerce'.<sup>5</sup> But is that really the case? And, if it is, what does this mean for Africa, given that the continent is acknowledged to have become increasingly interlinked with the global criminal economy over the past two decades or so?

These questions are important to explore from a policy perspective. Foreign criminal actors may well be influential in the African context, but arguably not always in ways that popular perceptions of strategic or shrewd criminal investment or migration might suggest. Some displaced criminal groups and actors manage to survive and even prosper; however, others do not. The policy question to ask in this case is, why this disparity? And what does that mean for future policy in respect of African states achieving greater security for their people?

The paper draws on extensive research conducted over a number of years into various criminal networks in different parts of Africa. Some of these are presented as case studies to illustrate a wider set of issues. This work has drawn on

multiple sources, including interviews with those directly involved in different criminal markets, discussions with law enforcement officials both African and foreign, the review of court records and other government documentation, and media and civil society reporting.

The paper begins with an overview of what is known about the presence of foreign criminal actors in African countries, drawing on the recently released African and global organised crime indexes produced by ENACT and the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC). It then explores what is known about why and how criminal groups relocate, suggesting that reasons for such transnational movement can be classified into four types.

The paper draws on evidence from case studies of foreign criminal actors operating in East, West and Southern Africa, which are analysed to explore these typologies further. Finally, drawing on the case studies, the implications for policy in terms of how best to develop a meaningful response to foreign organised criminal actors are discussed.

## Definitional challenges

Defining what 'organised crime' means poses a challenge for any analyst, and even more so when the word 'foreign' is placed in front of the term to qualify it. As mentioned, Varese's prominent analysis on criminal movement and transplantation focuses on traditional mafia groups, and their ability 'to operate an outpost over a sustained period outside of [a] region of origin and routine operation'.<sup>6</sup>

Our focus here is broader. It explores the movement of criminal actors and networks that are not necessarily traditional mafias, but do display the characteristics of organised crime. This generally implies that more loosely structured organisations run like networks and so are shaped by the actions of key individuals.

'With globalization,' explains Danilo Mandić in a new study of organised crime and separatist conflict in the contemporary world, 'hierarchy in transnational mafias became unattainable'.<sup>7</sup> According to Mandić's conclusion, globalisation, which spurred the movement of organised crime groups to foreign markets in the first place, has eroded some of the very features that defined such groups. Although some criminal groups may have retained centralised forms of control, illicit business structures are now inevitably networked in terms of how they are organised.

Networks presuppose individual nodes who have contact and influence in the global spiderweb of engagements. Mafias, on the other hand, are characterised by hierarchical, centrally controlled structures. The movement and placement of those individuals are important to the operation of the wider network: criminally inclined individuals who have moved overseas are central to the growth of illicit markets and networks. That raises one of the central questions addressed by this paper: how successful are criminal actors and organised crime groups who move to overseas markets, in this case in Africa? And how embedded in their new territories can they become?

Two of the case studies in the paper examine the criminal careers of individuals whose actions and choices were linked to the growth of offshore criminal networks. Individual criminal careers, including in the study of organised crime, should remain an important focus. Nevertheless, this raises the definitional challenge of connecting individuals to criminal groups.

Networks presuppose individual nodes who have contact and influence in the global spiderweb of engagements

The focus of the study is on both individuals and criminal networks and groups, including how the former shape and engage with the latter, and how some individuals – as leaders, influencers or particularly successful criminal entrepreneurs – build wider organisations around them in foreign countries.

Defining someone or something as 'foreign' is a process that risks becoming politically or racially charged and, sadly, often elicits the prejudice of parties to the debate. Hence it is important to state at the outset that the point of this paper is not to reinforce stereotypes that have formed in the popular consciousness towards any nationality or group of people. At the same time, however, given that references to 'foreigners' are often made in debates on organised crime, the topic seems one that should not be avoided, although it clearly requires sensitive treatment.

For our purposes here, 'foreign criminal actors' draws on the definition contained in ENACT's Organised Crime

Index – Africa for 2021, and refers to ‘state or non-state criminal actors operating outside their home country.’<sup>8</sup> This definition includes ‘not just foreign nationals but also various diaspora groups that have created roots in the country over multiple generations.’<sup>9</sup>

In reality, many of the latter may no longer be strictly ‘foreign’, in the sense that they may have assumed the local nationality, acquired citizenship and cut or reduced ties to their home countries. However, the reference is retained in the index, as the expert group discussions that inform the analysis therein identify such groups of people as distinct, even if there is a recognition that nationalities may have in fact changed.

## Measuring foreign organised crime in Africa

The recently completed second iteration of the ENACT Organised Crime Index – Africa, combined with the ability to compare and contrast its results with findings of the GI-TOC Global Organized Crime Index data (both datasets are from 2020), provides a useful portal through which to present an overview of the presence of foreign criminal actors in Africa. The index provides a measure of all external criminal actors – including Africans and non-African foreigners – for each African country.

A comparison of averaged country data across all of the world’s regions from the Global Organized

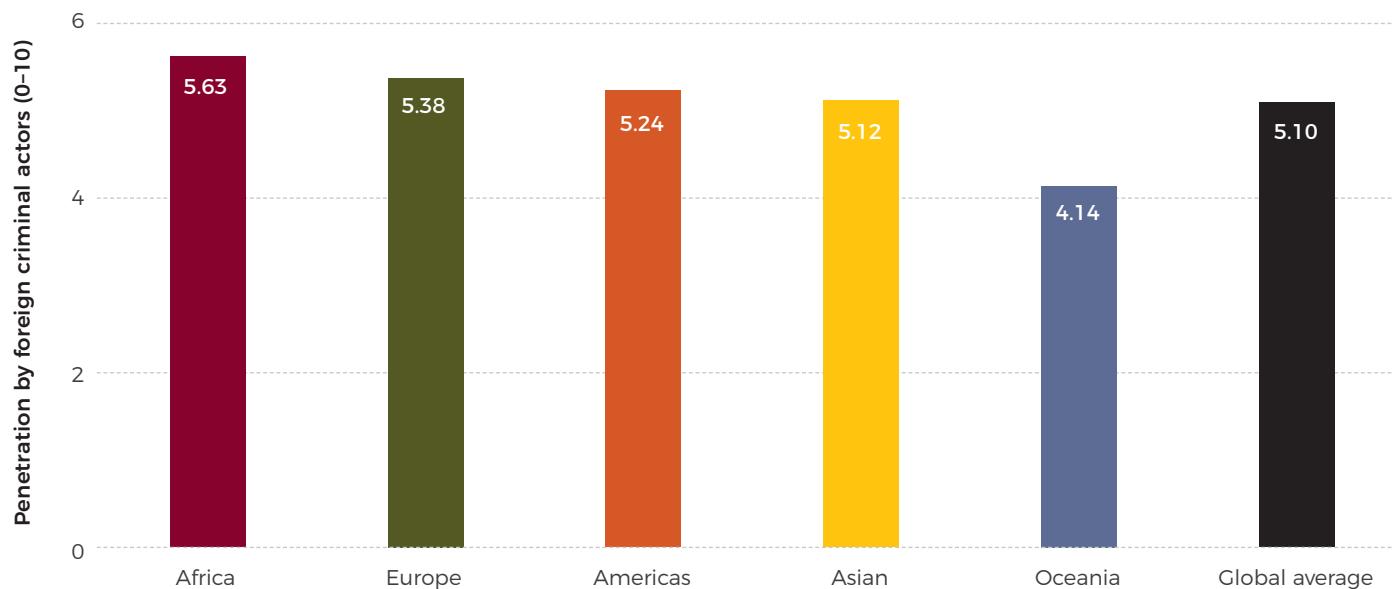
Crime Index, shown in Chart 1, suggests that African countries have the highest level of penetration by foreign criminal actors of any region in the world. The African score of 5.63 (on a scale of 1 to 10, from low presence to high presence) is well above the global average and several points ahead of the next region, Europe, with a score of 5.38.

Africa also scores higher than the Americas and Asia, regions that experience notoriously high levels of organised crime. Africa is attributed with both a high presence of foreign criminal actors and a high level of organised crime. Europe, by contrast, has a high level of foreign criminal actors but lower levels of organised crime.<sup>10</sup>

According to the index data, foreign criminal actors also appear to have a disproportionate influence in Africa. A significant number of countries on the continent (22) report that foreign criminal actors have a ‘significant influence’ on their national illicit economy. A slightly higher number of African countries (24) report that foreign criminal actors have a ‘moderate influence’. In other words, 85% of countries in Africa experience significant to moderate influence of foreign criminal actors.

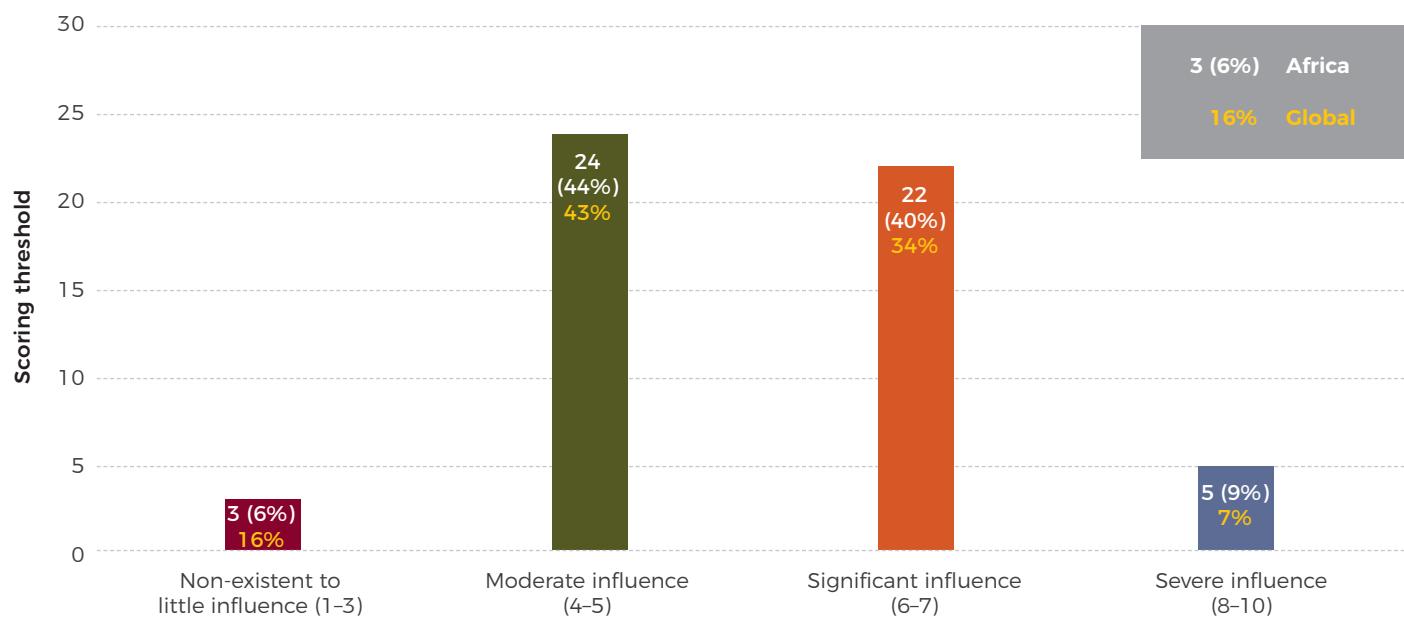
In both cases, the level of influence is higher than the global average – 6% higher in the category of ‘significant influence’. This is particularly the case in respect of those countries where foreign criminal actors

**Chart 1: A comparative regional measure of foreign criminal actors**



Source: GI-TOC, Global Organized Crime Index, 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/ocindex-2021/>

**Chart 2: Impact of foreign criminal actors in Africa compared with global average**



Source: GI-TOC, *Global Organized Crime Index, 2021*, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/ocindex-2021/>

are rated as having 'significant influence': this applies to 40% of all African countries, but only 34% of countries at the global level. How Africa compares with the rest of the world in terms of the impact of foreign criminal actors is shown in Chart 2.

The geographic distribution of countries where foreign criminal actors have influence starts at the southernmost tip of the continent, in South Africa and Namibia, runs up the east coast, then extends west across large swathes of Central Africa to West Africa, where there is a significant impact among the coastal states (see Chart 3).

The continent's major regional economic powerhouses, South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria, which are well integrated into global trade and transportation networks, show comparatively high scores for foreign criminal actors. However on the opposite end of the economic spectrum, several poor, conflict-afflicted countries also have high ratings for foreign criminal influence. These include Mozambique, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic.

Qualitative reporting by country for the index allows for an assessment of where foreign criminal actors are from. Here, a broad distinction between global (i.e. non-African) foreign criminal actors and African actors is worth making. Forty-two of the continent's 54 countries listed non-African criminal actors, networks and groups as being significant.

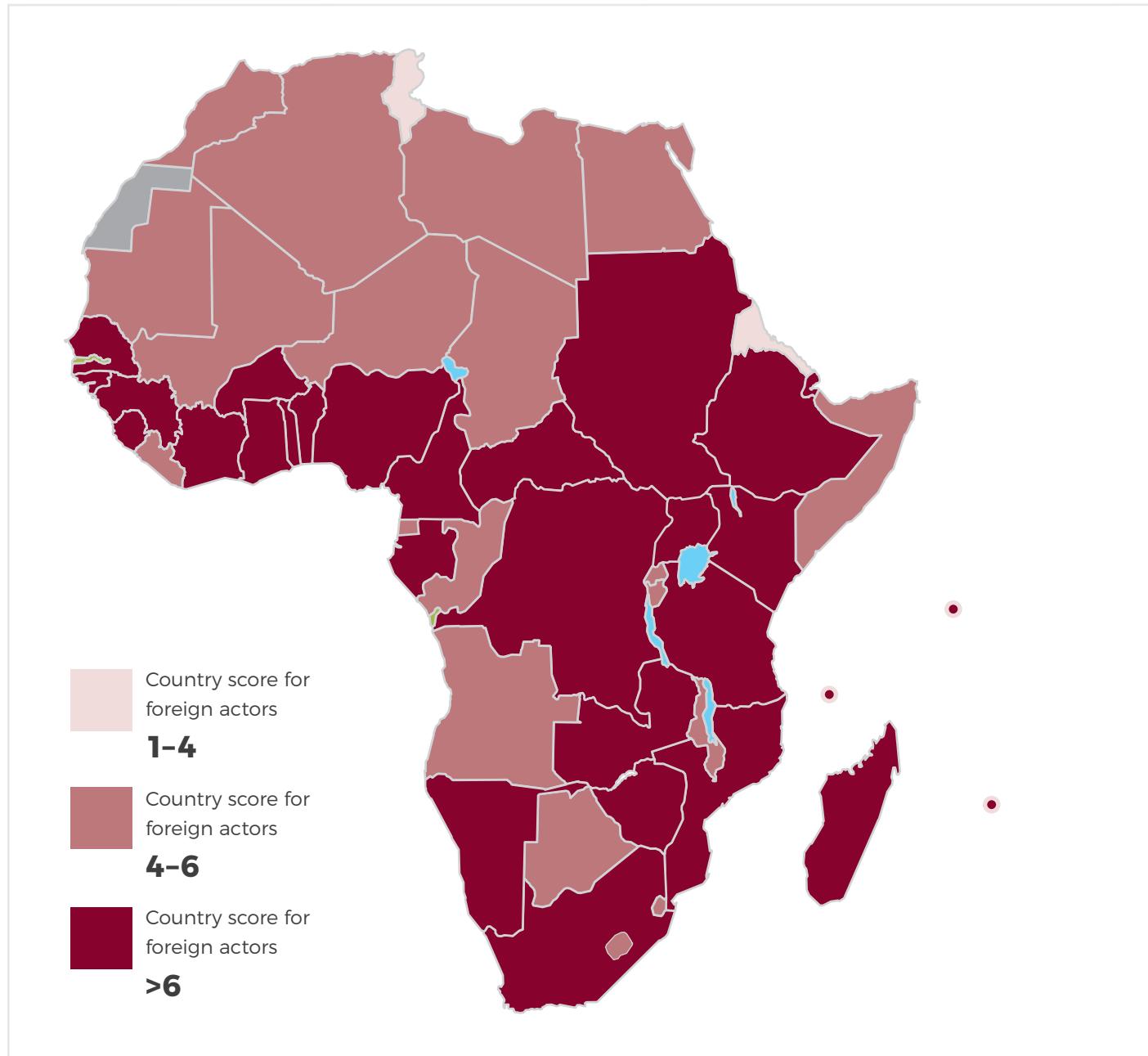
These include a large diversity of nationalities, the most common being Asian, mainly Chinese and Vietnamese, Latin American, including Colombians and Brazilians, Middle Eastern, including Gulf nationals, and South Asians and Europeans. Forty-six countries listed foreign African actors of concern. These included Nigerians, Congolese, South Africans and a large number of other nationalities.

The continent's major regional economic powerhouses show comparatively high scores for foreign criminal actors

What the index data cannot provide is a retrospective perspective on the growth or spread of foreign criminal actors in Africa before 2018. What we do know, however, is that as Africa became more integrated into the global criminal economy, in particular since 2000, the presence of foreign criminal actors increased.<sup>11</sup>

That is not to say that there were no foreign criminal networks before then, but there has been a sizable increase in both the numbers of actors and the range of countries of provenance. That growth has occurred in

**Chart 3: The impact of foreign criminal actors in Africa**



Source: GI-TOC, Global Organized Crime Index, 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/ocindex-2021/>

the context of rapidly advancing globalisation and the integration of Africa into global illicit markets, including drugs, markets for non-renewable resources, and environmental commodities.

The impact of foreign criminal actors is more difficult to determine than their presence. Drawing on the index data, there is, overall, a moderate correlation between the measured extent and impact of the presence of foreign actors and overall levels of criminal markets, as

measured across the 10 illegal markets included in the index.<sup>12</sup> This is higher for Africa than the globe, however.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps surprisingly, there is no strong correlation between any illicit market (including four drug markets) and foreign actors – the only exception being a moderate correlation between foreign actors and illicit wildlife markets.<sup>14</sup> This is however considerably higher – in fact, more than double – than the correlation at the global level.<sup>15</sup>

These measures provide some insight into the nature of foreign criminal actors, networks and groups across the continent. It does not however provide a qualitative insight into how foreign criminal actors may have become rooted in Africa. It is to that question that we now turn.

## Foreign actors: spot the differences

Foreign criminal actors in Africa are not all the same. While all are presumably motivated by the accumulation of profit, that assertion does little to help analyse the differences between what is clearly a whole spectrum of possible types.

However discussions and interviews with law enforcement officers and journalists who have covered various cases involving foreign actors over the years repeatedly raise two issues that broadly help plot some commonality in the patterns.<sup>16</sup> The first is the original reason for leaving home; the second is how much money foreign criminal actors may have when they arrive. The relevance of these questions can be explained as follows:

- A focus on the **original reason** for departing home to pursue a criminal career elsewhere goes to the heart of the discussion about organised criminal transplantation. Critical in this discussion is whether the reason for departure is a 'push' factor, for

example fleeing law enforcement action or another threat at home, or a 'pull' factor, such as being drawn to a potential criminal opportunity elsewhere.

- The **amount of resources available** to invest in new criminal ventures or to buy protection is a critical measure of both preparations to move and the ability to pave the way for success in new ventures. In principle, a transplanting criminal actor with resources should be more successful than one without.

These are of course not the only two criteria for assessing the motives and incentives for why any number of individuals and organisations might move elsewhere in search of success. But they do at the very least provide a useful starting point to understand a broad pattern of behaviours, motives and means.

More specifically, the reason for movement and the amount of resources available may provide a useful idea of the chances of long-term success: they speak to motivation, density of contacts and resources to facilitate settlement. If they are measured against each other – that is, the underlying reasons for movement against the resources in place to facilitate that movement – the result is a matrix of possible typologies of foreign criminal actors. These are presented in Chart 4.

When the two key criteria are plotted on the matrix, four actor typologies present themselves:

**Chart 4: The reasons for the movement of foreign criminal actors against the resources they may possess**



Source: GI-TOC, Global Organized Crime Index, 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/ocindex-2021/>

1. **Significant resources – pushed:** In the top left corner are individuals, networks or groups who have access to large-scale financial resources but who moved because they were forced to. In this case, the reason may be the impact of law enforcement operations or the fact that they are under threat from other criminal groups. Whatever the case, they leave in a hurry and arrive with little preparation and no clear strategic objective. It is for that reason that they are referred to here as '**fugitives**'.
2. **Significant resources – pulled:** In the top right corner are individuals, networks or organisations who possess significant resources and who move to position their operations for further expansion – the quintessential argument for the strategic spread of organised crime in a globalised world. This is both voluntary movement and an investment. The term used to describe this category – '**family**' – does not denote movement as part of a family or relative group, but draws on the term 'family' in the mafia sense. That is, representatives of a closed criminal group moving under instruction and with the resources needed to expand criminal markets.
3. **Few resources – pushed:** In the bottom left corner of the matrix are individuals, networks or groups who move without initially having a clear criminal purpose. They are generally 'pushed' by circumstances from places of poor economic opportunity, persecution or conflict to ones that offer a better opportunity. They arrive with little in hand. Highly entrepreneurial, they may develop criminal market interests over time but arguably may struggle to exploit them given lack of capital. For our purposes, we refer to this category of criminal actors as '**fortune seekers**'.
4. **Few resources – pulled:** In the bottom right corner of the matrix are individuals, networks or groups who moved to exploit an identified criminal opportunity, but did so with few resources. Such actors are generally part of larger criminal networks elsewhere who spot opportunities for building new markets, or agree to travel with this purpose. Such arrangements have a strong element of '**franchising**', in that criminal entrepreneurs may move in order to position themselves to link to a wider criminal network, and pay (willingly or unwillingly) for that privilege, and so we refer to them as '**franchisees**'.

Before exploring these four typologies – fugitives, family, fortune seekers and franchisees – in greater detail, an additional set of conceptual points is worth exploring.

These relate not only to the advantage that foreign criminal actors have, but also to their one significant disadvantage.

Typologies are of course only one way of 'describing groups of respondents displaying different clusters of behaviour, attitudes or views of the world'.<sup>17</sup> They have become very common tools in scholarly, policy and market research, partly because they enable the simplification of complex social realities for writing and presentation.

This simplification needs to be acknowledged at the outset of any explanation that frames argument in this way. Typologies and their attached case studies may reduce social phenomena to a series of categories that in fact shade into or overlap with each other. They may also not take into account the fact that the case studies on which they draw occur in different contexts with circumstances that are not static but change over time.

Foreign actors are often able to act as agents between the local criminal networks in their adopted home

If typologies are read with this understanding, that they are a portal to examining complex social patterns, then they may be useful (if not definitive) guides to breaking down and analysing a phenomenon, promoting a debate around responses.<sup>18</sup>

## Achieving criminal embedment: foreign advantage and risk

One of the most important comparative advantages that foreign criminal actors wield over others is their connectedness to external criminal networks and knowledge of a criminal ecosystem that extends beyond the boundaries of their new 'home'. That international contact book means that foreign actors are often able to act as agents between the local criminal networks in their adopted home (to sell or source products) and the external global criminal networks to which they belong. However, there may well be some posturing in this relationship on the part

of foreign actors, who may oversell the strength of their contacts and criminal experience to bolster their local reputation in their new markets.

Simultaneously, however, the greatest weakness facing foreign criminal actors is their lack of local contacts and protection – in short, the fact that they are outsiders in a foreign country. Forging relationships with local criminal networks can be challenging without knowledge and understanding of the new environment, such as whether a group or individual may be aligned politically or act as an informant for law enforcement.

Making a move into a new environment requires finding local criminal allies, and the most likely route is recommendations of other foreign actors. The difficulty of linking up with ‘reliable’ local criminal networks may be overcome by the presence of a diaspora willing to help out their compatriots.

The most important tool that any foreign criminal actor has is arguably not the ability to deploy violence, but the ability to corrupt, partly by brandishing his or her reputation as an outsider with influence and/or money. Violence is not always a useful option in an environment where the initiator could be outgunned in retaliation.

The key tool for foreign criminal actors in such circumstances is to discreetly buy protection, through the political or criminal justice system, or both. Such a

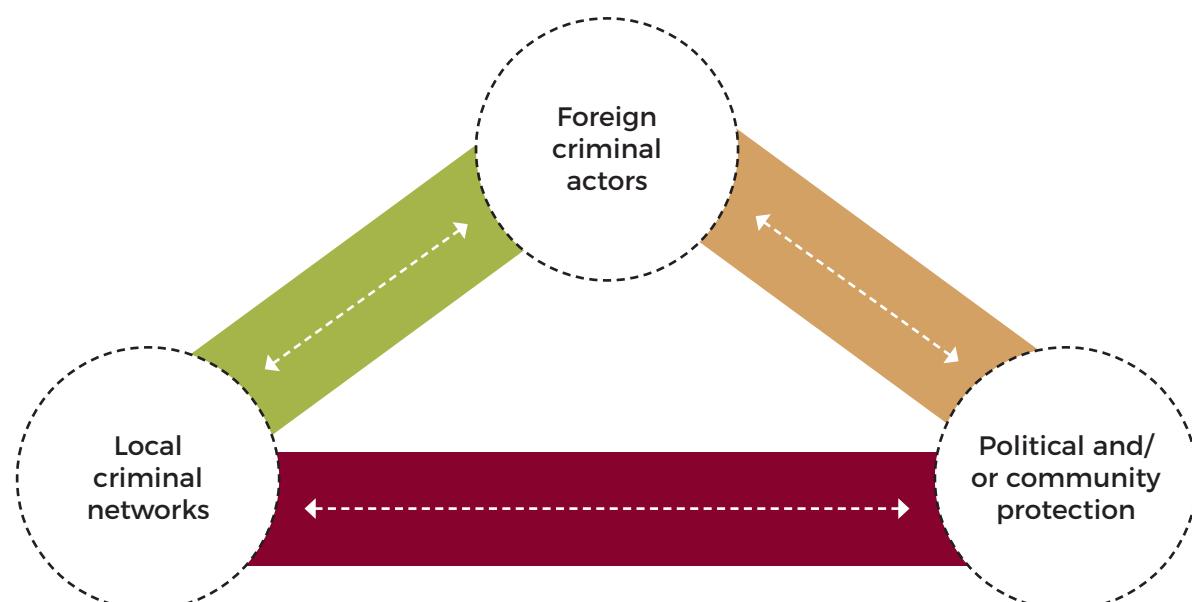
process is, however, notoriously unreliable: the corrupt official might change allegiance, demand more money or take the cash and sell the foreigner out to the local crime bosses or police. The risk for the foreigner lurks around every corner.

## Making a move into a new environment requires finding local criminal allies

The relationship between a freshly arrived foreign criminal actor in unfamiliar territory can be illustrated as a triangle of connected parties (see Chart 5). At one apex is the new arrival; at another is the established local criminal fraternity, who may elect to work with, absorb or reject the new arrival. At the other is the state apparatus, a spectrum of actors from law enforcement to political office holders, who may protect or target the new arrival. This is a duplicity that depends on the nature of their own relationship in support of or opposition to the established local organised criminal fraternity.

In short, the dynamics of the relationships that play out in this fragile, precarious trinity will determine the degree and longevity of criminal embeddedness achieved by an external criminal actor or organisation.

**Chart 5: Triangle of criminal relationships at local level**



Source: GI-TOC, Global Organized Crime Index, 2021, <https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/ocindex-2021/>

These triangular relationships can be discerned in a series of case studies taken from the African context (see the next section), which illustrate the four typologies of foreign criminal actors seen above in the matrix model.

## Foreign criminal actors in Africa: four case studies

Obtaining useful case study material on hidden criminal activities can be challenging. The following cases of criminals operating in Africa have been selected on the basis that they present how certain foreign actors arrived in Africa and attempted to embed their criminal enterprises, either succeeding or failing in the process. There are many other cases that illustrate similar concepts, but it is hoped that, taken together, these illustrate the principles for wider application.

### The 'fugitive': Radovan Krejcir, Johannesburg

A classic case of the 'fugitive' is notorious gangland figure Radovan Krejcir from the Czech Republic. Krejcir earned his criminal spurs in the turbulent years at the end of the Soviet Union and the creation of the Czech Republic. An engineering graduate, he stumbled onto a scheme (one of several that he tried) that involved illegally manipulating an oil-import subsidy, from which he is said to have generated considerable profits.

With these resources, Krejcir bought the support of an ever-widening circle of state actors – politicians, prosecutors and the police – from whom he received protection for his, and his criminal networks', activities. Things then turned bad, with Krejcir apparently funding an opposition politician who lost his gambit for power, leaving him exposed. A crackdown by the Czech authorities in 2005 saw Krejcir flee the country overnight, first to the Seychelles.

Krejcir arrived in South Africa in 2007. Within a few years, the South African Revenue Service had placed this fugitive at the top of its list of organised crime figures deserving of the state's attention.<sup>19</sup> Krejcir used all the tools in the organised crime playbook: violence, extortion, extensive corruption and connections to politics. For many observers, it is small wonder that he lasted as long as he did and could build a criminal network at all.

That suggests, in the cut-throat business of the Johannesburg and wider South African underworld, that this outsider had some advantage cards to play. He could be introduced without the burden of locals fully knowing his background, and could play the part of the international mafia figure. He could judge the nature and weakness of South Africa's turbulent post-transitional politics, and as an outsider he could seek out the police, insinuating himself not as an opponent but as a potential ally in their internal struggles. Krejcir can be regarded as one of the most violent and high-profile 'underworld figures' of the post-apartheid era.<sup>20</sup>

### Not lying low

Having assessed the options available to him, Krejcir first chose to move to the Indian Ocean island state of Seychelles, which was then developing a reputation as a tax haven. Settling in, he made donations to various political interests on the island (in some cases even before he arrived). From there it was a short step to buying citizenship and a passport.

But his political cover soon evaporated when the then president of the Seychelles was ousted and his wider political network soured on him.<sup>21</sup> He looked for greener pastures, with evidence that he had already been in contact with South African foreign intelligence, perhaps in an attempt to sell information on money laundering in the Seychelles.<sup>22</sup>

### Always a consummate networker, Krejcir shared a cell with a Greek Cypriot, George Louca

Entering South Africa from Madagascar on a Seychelles passport and under a false name, Krejcir was arrested on his arrival in Johannesburg. (The Czech Republic had warned the local authorities and he had been 'red flagged' by Interpol.) He spent a month in prison, before being released on bail and applying for refugee status. Always a consummate networker, he shared a cell with a Greek Cypriot, one George Louca (aka George Smith).

Louca, something of an outsider himself, had developed a wide network in Johannesburg's underworld, an

important segment of whom were clustered in the plush eastern suburb of Bedfordview. Krejcir subsequently moved in and ran his business from there. Louca's life was literally transformed by meeting Krejcir: he was witness to a murder allegedly carried out by the Czech, fled South Africa for Cyprus in fear for his life, was extradited while a sick man, but died in Johannesburg before he could testify.<sup>23</sup>

The Johannesburg criminal underworld, although long established, was in a period of significant transformation when Krejcir parachuted into it. The surges in criminal activity that had occurred from the late 1980s were beginning to consolidate around several key individuals. But the city was (and still is) a freewheeling place, and there was space for an outsider.

What is interesting from interviews with Krejcir's erstwhile Johannesburg criminal counterparts – some of whom were drawn to him like a moth to a flame – is that they didn't engage with him as a prospective 'leader of the underworld', but because he spoke a language they understood: that of money.<sup>24</sup>

'When Radovan got here, word got out fast,' said one interviewee. 'There's a Czech billionaire here and he has the things that go with that – the house, the cars ... and people came to him. They came with all their plans and scams, and they came with their legitimate ideas, and they came with their illicit schemes.'<sup>25</sup>

Krejcir seemed to want to personify the mafia don. Holding counsel from a Bedfordview fish restaurant (where he paid for bulletproof glass to be installed), he plotted a web of illicit business deals. He assembled in Bedfordview an organised crime group, but also developed a wider criminal network across the country, including some key crime bosses.

Interviews with law enforcement sources and those close to Krejcir suggest that he may not have made substantial amounts of money in Africa. He seemed to largely live off earnings that he already had. One scheme where he did make money, however, was laundering funds for Lolly Jackson, a well-known denizen of the country's sex industry, who wanted to take his cash offshore. Another source of income came from a pawnshop franchise, which also served as a front for laundering stolen goods, gold and diamonds. These businesses, and their laundering services, also served as a useful calling card in the increasingly interlocked Johannesburg underground.

Krejcir appeared to try his hand at numerous other illicit activities, among them drug smuggling, the sex industry (he tried to buy a chain of upmarket sex clubs after allegedly murdering Jackson), as well as value added tax, and bank and medical aid fraud.<sup>26</sup> As one journalist who followed Krejcir's activities closely reported: 'He had his fingers in a lot of pies without dominating anything specific. But that also gave him power, because he bought into a lot of different criminal networks around each of these enterprises.'<sup>27</sup>

### When funds run dry

As a mafia-type don at the centre of a web of illicit connections, Krejcir was adept at using another tool: gratuitous violence. Using his henchmen as hitmen, he left a trail of dead bodies across Johannesburg, allegedly killing several prominent figures in the local underworld. A police raid on his house discovered a hit list of targets. All told, he is suspected of being involved in the murder of some 11 people in South Africa.<sup>28</sup> He's also alleged to have ordered the killing of people in Eastern Europe at the time.<sup>29</sup>

As a mafia-type don at the centre of a web of illicit connections, Krejcir was adept at using another tool: gratuitous violence

As Krejcir's violence rattled local criminal networks, he came under threat from them. There were at least three recorded attempts to kill the Czech that failed, including a bomb attack on his business premises (in which two other people were killed). Most dramatically, a set of guns mounted on a car and aimed at his regular parking spot were remotely activated.

One reason that Krejcir felt he had a level of security in South Africa was that he bribed, on a large scale, police officers – most notably in police intelligence.<sup>30</sup> Police officers were also recruited to kidnap and murder on his account. Krejcir identified police crime intelligence as vulnerable, but a unit that could facilitate his work. He appears to have sought, and found, contacts at the very top of the organisation (likely making payments to them).<sup>31</sup>

His relationship with the political elite, a key part of his playbook elsewhere, is far less clear: he boasted of

making a large donation to former president Jacob Zuma's election campaign, but this has never been substantiated.<sup>32</sup>

Krejcir's fall was as rapid as his rise – a lesson on the vulnerabilities of the 'fugitive' in foreign territory. By mid-2013, his assets had been frozen and he was arrested for kidnapping and attempted murder in a drug deal that seems to have gone wrong. With the arteries of his cashflow blocked by the state, it was reported that this fugitive grew increasingly isolated as the means that had been his sustenance to maintain his criminal network or the system of protection around him dried up.

## Krejcir's fall was as rapid as his rise – a lesson on the vulnerabilities of the 'fugitive' in foreign territory

There had been several reasons for this. The first is that Krejcir attracted, quite deliberately, a lot of media attention, acting as a self-styled foreign mafia kingpin. That embarrassed the political establishment. But he also came to threaten the local criminal underworld, including through the use of gratuitous violence, which aggravated his foes.

The fugitive's system of criminal and police protection eventually turned on him because his own resources were drying up (his South African activities were not turning a profit), and because continued media coverage was likely to expose a wider criminal network. South Africa was also experiencing xenophobic violence at the time. It is perhaps worth posing the question here whether he would have been targeted had he been a local gangster.

## 'Family' expansion: Latin American cartels in Guinea-Bissau

Latin American drug trafficking organisations began to seek new routes to traffic cocaine to Europe from the late 1990s. This was in response to stronger American and European law enforcement in the Caribbean Basin, but also partly because of the fragmentation of the

cartels, with many newer groups that were looking for opportunities.

Around that time, the small, poorly developed and politically fragile West African country of Guinea-Bissau developed into a major hub for cocaine trafficking between Latin America and Europe. This also applied to several other countries in the region at the time – notably Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea – but it is Guinea-Bissau that is acknowledged to have the longest-standing problem.<sup>33</sup>

Traffickers from Latin America as representatives of foreign cartels ('families' in our typology here) did not simply arrive in Guinea-Bissau or the wider West Africa region unannounced. In the case of Guinea-Bissau, they appear to have been invited by a set of local Bissau-Guinean criminal entrepreneurs who had cut their teeth dealing in drugs at street level in Europe. Having acquired some knowledge and understanding of the business, as well as contacts, the then small-time local drug traffickers made an introduction to former Bissauan president João Bernardo 'Nino' Vieira. He had been forced from office and was seeking to return to power.<sup>34</sup>

Vieira identified the drug trade as a possible source of cash to help fund a potential political comeback. He returned to power in 2005, after elections held in the wake of a political coup in 2003. The military, which had close ties to Vieira, appear to have been key to opening the door. Sworn testimony from criminal facilitators in Bissau indicates that it was in 2003 and 2004, after a military coup, that Latin American cocaine was transported in increasingly greater volumes by plane into Guinea-Bissau.<sup>35</sup>

### *Trafficking by mutual agreement*

Vieira's return to power marked an important turning point for drug trafficking through Guinea-Bissau. Traffickers from Latin America established a presence in the country. Numerous interviews suggest that the cocaine through-trade boomed in this period. Latin American traffickers, primarily Colombians and Venezuelans, became a prominent part of the elite Bissau scene.

The Latin Americans didn't appear to be concerned about their visibility in the small country: they moved around openly in Bissau, hosted parties and dinners, were trailed by attractive women on their payroll and drove around in

conspicuously expensive cars.<sup>36</sup> Vieira soon followed suit, acquiring a large American Hummer.<sup>37</sup>

Who exactly the Latin Americans in Bissau were is not well known, but there is one exception. One of the prominent traffickers was Colombian Rafael Antonio Garavito-Garcia, who was covertly recorded by the United States Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) as saying that he was responsible for pioneering and developing the drug trafficking business in Guinea-Bissau. One reason he gave was that the country had no American presence and a sympathetic political elite.<sup>38</sup> Several cartels are said to have been involved across West Africa; in Guinea-Bissau, these included the Mexican Los Zetas, the Sinaloa Cartel and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel.<sup>39</sup>

The Guinea-Bissauan military, including actors in the three branches of the armed services and senior generals, were at pains to protect the traffickers. The protection fees paid by the Latin American traffickers to the military were calculated at 15% of the value of each shipment – equivalent to payments in the region of €1 000 to €1 650 per kilogram of cocaine.<sup>40</sup> An estimated six to eight tonnes of cocaine transited Guinea-Bissau between November 2007 and January 2008 alone.<sup>41</sup>

By 2007 the situation had become so severe that the United Nations (UN) and International Monetary Fund warned the international community that emergency post-conflict assistance would be the last opportunity to save Guinea-Bissau from impending instability and the grip of the Latin American drug cartels.<sup>42</sup>

The degree to which the Latin American traffickers had embedded themselves in Guinea-Bissau as agents for the cartels (the ‘families’) was clear from a number of incidents. For example, in September 2006, a seizure of 674 kg of cocaine by the country’s courageous Judicial Police (who, remarkably, continued to operate in the face of immense political and military pressure) was then re-seized by military personnel.

The drugs disappeared. In April 2007, military forces again intervened, this time to prevent the Judicial Police from seizing a multi-tonne consignment of cocaine. The cocaine trade also became more brazen. Previously, planes air-freighting drugs that had landed on clandestine runways would now touch down at Bissau’s main international airport. In one case involving an aircraft that experienced technical difficulties, a Venezuelan pilot with ties to the Mexican Sinaloa cartel was arrested and then released.

In Bissau, the Latin American cartel representatives continued to live the high life, including openly dining with the president, Vieira, in a hotel that he owned.<sup>43</sup> The traffickers recognised the importance of their military and political protective shield – business, after all, would not have been possible without their political-military ‘patrons’.<sup>44</sup>

The degree to which the traffickers sought to understand their ‘hosts’ is clear from an incident in August 2007. The ever-active Judicial Police had raided a warehouse owned by a local Bissauan businessman with strong ties to the traffickers. There, the police found a whiteboard on which the Latin American traffickers had sketched out an organogram of the country’s main powerholders and how they were linked. In the diagram was the name of the president as well as major political and military figures.<sup>45</sup>

A series of political crises then unfolded, including what has been described as a ‘half coup’ in April 2010

The find was a fascinating example of how critical an accurate understanding of the local ecosystem and power relations was for the traffickers. Should that protective ecosystem shift or change, they must have calculated, business would be irreparably damaged.

## When protection fails

That raid on the warehouse and the discovery of the whiteboard with its network of power diagram did indeed signify a political shift – perhaps one the Latin Americans were seeking to understand. A prominent local trafficker with close ties to both the Latin Americans and the local politico-military elite later reported that trust had begun to break down.<sup>46</sup>

Local military figures had begun to get greedy, either stealing drug consignments instead of protecting them or demanding higher protection fees. This changing pattern had two consequences. For one, the flow of drugs through Guinea-Bissau diminished. Secondly, the through-trade of cocaine was displaced to a number of neighbouring countries, notably Sierra Leone and Liberia.<sup>47</sup>

The drying up of the cocaine trade through Bissau had political consequences. With the political elite starved of resources, internal political competition turned violent. In March 2009, a bomb attack killed the military chief of staff, General Batista Tagme Na Waie. (The sophistication of the device left many wondering whether the traffickers themselves had been involved.) Within hours, Vieira was captured and killed by soldiers loyal to the former chief of staff.

A series of political crises then unfolded, including what has been described as a 'half coup' in April 2010, when a new military-aligned civilian government was installed, only to be later overturned after protests. General António Indjai, an officer suspected to have links to the traffickers, was appointed chief of staff of the military.<sup>48</sup> The Latin Americans subsequently reappeared, although this time they maintained a much lower profile. Strong international pressure on the reappointed civilian government appeared to keep drug trafficking in check for some time.

## With the political elite starved of resources, internal political competition turned violent

In April 2012, however, the government in Bissau was overthrown in what has been described as a 'cocaine coup', with the military seizing control, presumably in the hope of re-establishing the drug economy. With Indjai now at the helm, trafficking resumed. A DEA sting operation in April 2013 changed the equation, however, and although Indjai avoided arrest, several other players, including Garavito-Garcia, found themselves standing trial in New York.

The 2013 DEA operation did not end trafficking, although it clearly took the momentum out of the cocaine transit traffic for several years. Then, by 2019 and 2020, several large reported cocaine seizures indicated that the trade was firmly back on its feet. Predictably, this was also the result of a new political order, with some in the elite strongly suspected of providing protection for traffickers. Indjai himself, having been forced out, made a reappearance, although not in an official position.

Cocaine trafficking is now widely regarded to have resumed in Guinea-Bissau, although Latin American traffickers have little, if any, profile in the country.<sup>49</sup> Family fortunes turned into misfortune? Or a case of (forced) delegation of part of the supply chain while still controlling the sale of the source product?

## Arrival of 'fortune seekers': Chinese organised crime in East Africa

Two Chinese syndicates that have been active in East Africa, the Yang Fenglan network and the Shuidong syndicate, are notorious for the extent of wildlife trafficking they've been engaged in. Important details are known about both as a result of a prosecution in Tanzania and an EIA investigation, respectively.

The criminal activities of both networks emerge out of China's post-1978 market reforms and the period of Chinese firms' overseas expansion known as 'going out'. 'Going out' is an apt description for a period that produced a number of fortune seekers who drew on their experience of working in Africa to later establish themselves in criminal business.

In a magazine profile, Yang Fenglan is described at the time of her arrest as 'a small bespectacled Chinese woman in her sixties'.<sup>50</sup> The image seems hardly the stuff of hardcore organised crime. Dubbed the 'Ivory Queen' by the media, Yang was arrested in late 2013 for attempting to traffic more than 700 elephant tusks, weighing nearly 1.9 tonnes and with a market value of more than US\$1.8 million, to East Asia.<sup>51</sup>

Yang is said to have come to Tanzania in the mid-1970s. She had studied Swahili in Beijing and then worked as a translator on a huge Chinese-supported construction project, the Tazara Railway, which linked Zambia's copper belt with the Tanzanian port capital of Dar es Salaam. After the railway was completed, she returned to China.<sup>52</sup> Besides her Swahili language abilities, she was now also equipped with experience of doing business in Africa, and in Tanzania in particular, where English is not widely spoken and fluency in Swahili is an enormous asset. Both skills made this fortune seeker very well equipped.

## Ivory Queen: crowned, then dethroned?

In the late 1990s, Yang returned to Tanzania to open an eatery, Beijing Restaurant. *The New Statesman* described the restaurant as 'an unpretentious place with a palm-

thatched roof.<sup>53</sup> Yang soon emerged as a pillar of the local Chinese community, a regular at international trade fairs in Dar es Salaam and secretary-general of the China-Africa Business Council of Tanzania.<sup>54</sup>

Behind this respectable façade, however, Yang and two Tanzanian associates over a period of 14 years were found to have run a network that had links with suppliers of poached ivory and transport of ivory for export out of Dar es Salaam and Zanzibar. 'Building and sustaining such an operation over an extended period of time requires formidable organisational skills, a good source of finance as well as resilience and adaptability,' conclude Chris Alden and Ross Harvey in a 2020 study for the GI-TOC.<sup>55</sup> Beijing Restaurant also served as a useful site for laundering money acquired through the illegal ivory trade.

As Alden and Harvey suggest, it's hard to believe that members of the Chinese and wider Tanzanian business community didn't have some knowledge of the illegal activities in which Yang was engaged, or indeed didn't participate in it.<sup>56</sup> For one, Beijing Restaurant appeared to be well known and widely patronised. At Yang's trial, a former employee testified that parties attended by large numbers were held at the restaurant while illegal activities took place there.<sup>57</sup>

Ironically, at her trial Yang's lawyer claimed she was a foreigner and didn't have a local network to care for her.<sup>58</sup> Several times during her trial, Yang, according to the court transcript, shouted out: 'IT IS NOT TRUE, I DIDN'T LEAD ORGANIZE CRIME.' (The statements are the only ones in capital letters in the transcript.)<sup>59</sup> While this was clearly part of her defence strategy in court, in her mind the statement may well have rung true.

Yang most likely did not see herself as an organised crime figure, in the sense of the globally notorious Chinese triads, but rather as a businesswoman engaged in, at worst, a grey trade. Yang's role as a woman in a leadership role in the illegal wildlife business is significant in its own right and, although not without precedent in established forms of organised crime such as the triads, highly unusual. It's perhaps the clearest indicator of all, at least to herself, that she had no formal criminal connections.<sup>60</sup>

Yang was able to use her superior knowledge of local officials, the language and conditions to manage a network that linked up suppliers of tusks with corrupt freight-forwarding agents and customs officials. These

nodes along the supply chain facilitated the export of an illegal product to destinations where her contacts sold the ivory on to Asian markets.<sup>61</sup>

## Shuidong syndicate: exchanging products and places

A second case study, that of the Shuidong syndicate, shows a different development trajectory. As in the case of Yang, the evidence suggests that a group of fortune-seeking individuals linked to a specific area in China, Shuidong, began an illegal business in one specific commodity. Then, using their experience, they worked their way up the wildlife commodity chain. The Shuidong syndicate began as a lower-level opportunistic business network in the sea cucumber trade before expanding their reach.<sup>62</sup> No evidence suggests that they arrived as fronts for, or representatives of, a criminal group.

## With the political elite starved of resources, internal political competition turned violent

Interviews conducted by the EIA with a key participant outlined how the network grew from one that had responded to growing demand in China for sea cucumbers in the 1990s, to one that shifted to ivory trafficking. The sea cucumber market had been dominated by people from Shuidong, and as Chinese supplies declined due to growing demand, networks had begun to look to international sources, including in East Africa. The Shuidong group set themselves up in Zanzibar.<sup>63</sup>

At the time, ivory trafficking from Africa was dominated by another criminal network originating in Putian, in Fujian Province. But the Shuidong network had numerous advantages. They were well embedded, with strong local contacts in Zanzibar and further afield. They had a sophisticated local system of protection through corrupt officials. And they had well-developed networks in China, which allowed them to effectively feed market demand. Over time, they scaled up their ivory trafficking activities, with multiple consignments documented by the EIA. The group diversified to include other wildlife contraband, most notably pangolin scales.

The Shuidong syndicate acted with great caution to protect themselves in Tanzania. The EIA notes in an overview of the case: 'The syndicate members on the ground were extremely cautious, protecting themselves by building a network of Tanzanian accomplices, they avoided contact with the ivory and ensured only that the names of the local co-conspirators, employed as freight agents, appeared on shipping documents.'<sup>64</sup>

Trusted locals handled the shipments, and payoffs per consignment were made to customs and port officials. The members of the network would watch from afar when shipments were being loaded, ready to leave the country should something go wrong.<sup>65</sup>

By 2015 and 2016, the Shuidong syndicate was well entrenched in the East African illicit environmental trade. Remarkably, given the capital they had invested there and experience they'd accumulated, they managed to shift operations from East Africa, which they regarded as less profitable, to West Africa.

## Trusted locals handled the shipments, and payoffs per consignment were made to customs and port officials

The reason for the shift was related, they said, to profit margins – the fact that yellow-tinged West African ivory fetched a higher price in China than the white East African variants. But there does also seem to have been a recognition that enforcement in Tanzania was growing, and generally being tightened up across East Africa – evident in the arrest of Yang in 2015. Nigeria also offered a highly corrupt environment conducive to doing illicit business.<sup>66</sup>

Another factor was significant in the Shuidong syndicate's move from East to West Africa. Its members forged a partnership with two Chinese businessmen from Fujian, home of the Chinese traffickers who originally controlled the ivory trade from East Africa. One of these businessmen had a company engaged in harvesting and transporting rosewood, a protected and much coveted species, from West Africa to China. That provided a useful cover, including storage facilities for stockpiling ivory before it was shifted.

By early 2017, three tonnes of elephant ivory and pangolin scales had been packed in containers ready for transfer to China. Nigerian customs officials assisted in the process for a fee. Nigeria has become a prominent platform for wildlife trafficking to a much higher degree than in the past.<sup>67</sup> The EIA's investigation into the Shuidong syndicate, and the passing of relevant evidence to the Chinese authorities, eventually led to the arrest and prosecution of the group's three main members in China.<sup>68</sup>

## Pakistani criminal 'franchisees' in Southern Africa

The arrival of Pakistani nationals in Southern Africa has been a pattern over the past two decades. Visa-free travel through Mozambique from Pakistan and the rise of the Gulf as a major airline transit hub have been key drivers of this migration.<sup>69</sup> The population of expatriate Pakistanis in South Africa is said to number between 70 000 and 100 000.

Pakistani migrants, often from poor backgrounds and seeking better opportunities, have brought enormous economic benefits, many managing successful businesses. Pakistani-owned cellphone shops, for example, have become a ubiquitous feature of Southern and East African cities, providing useful services in small towns.<sup>70</sup>

Yet there has been a darker undertone surrounding nationals from Pakistan. These include allegations of their involvement in drug trafficking, a growing number of sophisticated kidnapping syndicates, and cases of violent political confrontation linked to tensions within Pakistan, notably regarding migrants from Karachi. New arrivals join more established businesspeople from the South Asian diaspora in the region, some of whom are known to be players in the regional drug trade. Pakistani networks have grown as the so-called heroin trafficking southern route along the East African coast has become a more significant channel for smuggling that drug, and later methamphetamine, from Central Asia.<sup>71</sup>

Pakistani drug gangs in South Africa have become particularly prominent. A turf war between two Pakistani drug gangs, Lajpal and Basra, based in Johannesburg, led to a spate of assassinations and kidnappings between 2003 and 2009.<sup>72</sup> Pakistani groups were noted to be of concern in South Africa in the 2021 ENACT Organised Crime Index – Africa.<sup>73</sup> Pakistani press reports also suggest a growing link to South Africa, with

youngsters hired in drug-related killings in Karachi and Lahore fleeing to South Africa to escape arrest.<sup>74</sup>

Interviews with local South African crime bosses and Pakistani businessmen who are linked to the drug trade in South Africa provide some insight into the 'franchisee' arrangement that Pakistani criminal actors engage in. A Pakistani businessman, introduced to the GI-TOC by the South African crime gang that ensures his protection, explained the franchiser-franchisee relationship with new arrivals from Pakistan in the following way:

'They don't just come in for free ... they must pay of course. If we are Pakistanis selling here we are respectful ... there are others here also doing business and we will do business with them [a reference to the South African gang]. Our family on the other side that come here, they must pay to come to live and work here ... because we did. We paid and so it is a logical process to understand that they must pay us even if we are family ... because it is just business.'<sup>75</sup>

The Pakistani businessman-crime boss is said to pay people at the South African embassy in Islamabad or bribes at the borders to get them into the country with the correct documentation. 'They get the families then from Pakistan and they go through the doors ... straight into the shops ... maybe 20 of them. Of course, the business is a cover for drugs as well, and so it is very secretive ... the shop is just a false face for the business under the table.'<sup>76</sup>

### A coerced network?

The arrangement whereby arrivals ('franchisees') pay to be integrated into the local Pakistani drug distribution business is confirmed by interviews with a local gang boss: 'All the foreigners that come here to do our business, they must pay the Pakistani boss that got them here, and plus they must now all be his slaves because they must pay him for living here also, like a "lay-by citizenship", if we can call it something like that ... They say they are all family, but they are not family.'<sup>77</sup>

One reason to pass down the payment to new arrivals in drug networks is that the local Pakistani businessman and supplier is himself paying protection to the gangs, and the costs thus are cascaded downwards, much like a regular business franchise model.

The Cape Town-based Pakistani supplier who was interviewed was unequivocal in stating that it was not possible to do business without a link of some sort to the

local gangs, given their reputation for violence. Foreigners, he explained, must pay a 'tithe' or 'protection tax' to operate, and avoiding conflict with local criminals was essential to a successful business.<sup>78</sup> The degree to which Pakistani gangs can operate independently is probably more constrained in Cape Town, where local drug distribution is tightly monitored by local criminal gangs.

## The costs are cascaded downwards, much like a regular business franchise model

Another Cape Town gang boss explained the 'franchise' arrangement in this way: 'So the main boss, or the [Pakistani] guy who made the deals with the local bosses first so that they can sell drugs here, that guy is still paying the local gang bosses ... but he is charging his people to cover the protection cost, plus he is also charging them for running their shops and he can get them to sell drugs for him and they get a cut of that money, but he [will] take ... most of that share ... that's how they do it here.'<sup>79</sup>

The same boss explained that, in one case, new arrivals felt so poorly treated by their Pakistani boss, with the system of 'tax' being too onerous, that they tried to make an arrangement with the South African gangsters to have him killed.<sup>80</sup>

### Judging success and failure

How can we rate the relative success or failure of the criminal actors in these four case studies as they transplanted and embedded themselves in foreign territories?

The clearest failure must be assessed to be that of Radovan Krejcir. Even though Krejcir had the advantage of a very high profile, significant resources for criminal investment and high-level protection afforded by the state's security apparatus, he still couldn't achieve long-term embedment in the South African and wider criminal underworld.

The Krejcir case raises the question of whether he was a just a relatively sophisticated thug with a degree of charm, or an organised crime figure in his own right. The truth is that he was both. He built a criminal

network in Eastern Europe and then did the same in South Africa, to where he had fled. Yet he didn't represent a criminal group on arrival. (Although there were numerous Eastern European and Balkan criminal figures at around the same time in South Africa, they had no connection with Krejcir.) It is his profile and degree of impact on local criminal networks that make him a figure worth studying.

The success of the Latin American cartel emissaries in Guinea-Bissau should perhaps be regarded as qualified. They failed to achieve long-term embedment in West African territory, although arguably they may have outsourced the trafficking of drugs effectively to local entrepreneurs. Nevertheless, they were unable to sustain their position, embed, and over time grow their own networks of influence in the place where they had settled. Whether they clearly represented or introduced themselves as front figures for cocaine cartels has never been clear.

From interviews conducted over several years, no local figure has ever identified them as coming from a specific cartel, for example. They did not need to – the Bissau elites were simply happy to know that they could deliver cash if the movement of cocaine was protected, immaterial of whom they represented. The locals didn't show much fear of crossing the cartels either, presumably assuming (correctly, as it turns out) that they were far from home and vulnerable without local support.

The two Chinese criminal networks in East Africa were arguably more successful. Although Yang was eventually arrested, she achieved an impressive track record of criminal success as well as strong evidence of deeper embedment over decades. The Shuidong syndicate rates even more successfully, shifting its operations from one part of Africa to another in response to market and protection incentives. The two Chinese case studies do raise the question of the wider influence of Chinese organised crime, and investment and illegal activities by Chinese businesses, in Africa.

It may be legitimately asked whether both cases represent the full spectrum of Chinese-linked criminal activity in Africa. Without doubt, they do not. But they also raise the important prospect that we shouldn't simply assume that important criminal networks do not grow organically, or that unlikely figures (Yang being a prime example) don't have the ability to make critical contributions in a criminal economy.

The final case, of Pakistani drug trafficking networks in South Africa, suggests a long-term embedment that is proving to be successful. Few members of Pakistani criminal networks have been prosecuted and they have become key suppliers of heroin and methamphetamine to the country.

One point that has been raised in the case of the Pakistani networks is that they don't have publicly known leaders. In that respect, they are very similar to Nigerian criminal networks – widely spread, but hard for ordinary citizens (and law enforcement, for that matter) to identify who is in charge. That profile makes for a highly resilient network.

## Individual case studies will never be perfect representatives of individual foreign actor typologies

Given the complexity of criminal markets and people's criminal careers, individual case studies will never be perfect representatives of individual foreign actor typologies. Each needs to be understood in its own context. Nevertheless, five aspects are worth considering when examining comparative successes and failures in each case.

### 1. Public profile strategies of foreign criminal actors

Should we be surprised that a fugitive seeks publicity? In some cases – e.g. the case of a fugitive who needs quick entry to another country or the partner in a criminal regime, where hiding may be interpreted as cowardice or fear – incoming criminal actors may be forced to assume a public profile. Although potentially critical in the beginning, this is a dead-end strategy that greatly increases an individual's vulnerability. For longer-term survival, a discreet profile, where criminal activities are masked by legitimate business, is more effective.

For Krejcir, publicity appeared to be part of his criminal growth strategy, effectively a system of signalling to the wider criminal ecosystem that he was open for illicit business and business ideas (but also capable of great violence). Indeed, Johannesburg's criminal and grey business

community flocked to see what opportunities they might avail themselves of. Other fugitives have adopted the same approach.

Vito Palazzolo, a mafia financier, lived for several years in South Africa quite openly, entertaining members of the local underworld in swanky coffee shops at Cape Town's Waterfront. In that sense, a public persona is adopted as a symbolic denial of the status of being a fugitive. For that reason, high-profile criminal fugitives may be difficult to identify as fugitives, deliberately disguised as they are as business or underworld figures on the up and up.

In the end, however, Krejcir's publicity strategy backfired badly (although his demise was largely because his funds dried up and his involvement in violence threatened other criminal actors and embarrassed the authorities). Publicity may have short-term advantages as an aid to achieving deeper criminal embedment, but it has severe medium-term disadvantages.

Similarly, the Latin Americans in Guinea-Bissau acted for several years with impunity, doing little to hide their identity. Such a profile was necessary, even demanded, by their political and military hosts. But it gave their activities a profile that was hard to hide, drawing the attention of outsiders to the scaling-up of drug trafficking in Guinea-Bissau. They were eventually forced to flee.

In contrast, the Chinese criminal networks in East Africa assumed a lower profile, masked also by legitimate business activities. The Shuidong syndicate took extreme care when engaging in illicit business, for example watching the loading of containers from a distance and being ready to flee at short notice.

The Pakistani networks have the lowest profile of all. While there was a period of open conflict between groups, which drew attention to their presence in South Africa, such public displays of violence are relatively isolated and mainly occur in Johannesburg within the network itself. Few people outside law enforcement are even aware of their presence or activities.

## 2. Availability of investment resources

Both Krejcir and the Latin American traffickers in Guinea-Bissau had significant resources for criminal investment. In neither case, however, did this help with long-term embedment of their activities overseas. If anything, resources attracted unwanted attention of

other competitors in the criminal underworld and protection system.

In the case of Krejcir, when his money ran out, or was seized by the state, he was unable to pay to remain untouched. He was threatened by criminal competitors and ultimately by action from the state. What had seemed in the previous years to be an unassailable criminal position rapidly crumbled away.

## Criminal networks in East Africa assumed a lower profile, masked by legitimate business activities

The 'fugitive' who tries to enter new criminal networks far from home therefore faces challenges. Protection can be bought for a period – indeed, for several years, in Krejcir's case – but unless a local criminal business takes off and sustains itself, the fugitive remains vulnerable.

For their part, the Latin Americans did not so much run out of resources as court the greedy attention of their political and military patrons. The protectors wanted to own the business and tried to circumvent the Latin American traffickers. As a result, trust rapidly deteriorated and the business model fell apart, until it was reconstituted differently by a local group of criminal entrepreneurs.

The investment of the Chinese and Pakistani networks does not from the evidence appear to be in the form of money – it was rather in forging trusted local relations. While the networks clearly generated funds, these developed through their business activities. There are no reports of either network 'throwing money around' to buy criminal access. As a result, they attracted little attention and discreetly built resilient business models over time.

## 3. Incremental growth

The evidence from the case studies suggests that a rapidly built, cash-fuelled criminal presence makes for vulnerability, Krejcir being a case in point. But perhaps the typology that is most consistent with the idea that organised crime has globalised through the strategic activities of organised crime groups is that of 'family'

expansion. In theory at least, this entails designated members of criminal organisations 'tasked' to seek out new opportunities.

A good example of these aspects is that of the Latin American traffickers who sought a foothold in Guinea-Bissau. Critically, however, even in cases where a larger criminal organisation may be backing the expansion, local integration is challenging, complicated and liable to backfire. In contrast, both the Chinese and Pakistani networks were built incrementally – and by doing so may provide more resilient and more successful embedment.

Studying the origins and evolution of criminal groups is a useful way to bust some of the myths around them. A good example is the role of Chinese organised crime groups in the illegal ivory trade, in this case in Tanzania. Neither of the two groups had criminal origins. Rather, both were originally legitimate, or at least grey, entrepreneurial ventures that sensed opportunity in the illicit market for ivory. The key players took advantage of their connections in Tanzania and China to move into the illegal ivory market.

## Franchisees are effectively seeking to buy into an illegal business that is already under way

Both East African wildlife cases illustrate the highly networked and incremental (although rapid) growth of Chinese criminal networks involved in wildlife trafficking. The important takeaway is that these were not sophisticated criminal syndicates, but a set of networked individuals who had accumulated African experience and contacts, and used them to expand into new markets – the work of the fortune seeker. They positioned themselves over several years, well below the radar, buying local support and protection, and growing their illicit business as the opportunity arose.

The ultimate example of incremental growth is the franchisee arrangement seen in the Pakistani network. Franchisee criminal arrangements such as this can be difficult to identify, yet they are perhaps the most common typology in circumstances where an established foreign criminal network is present, and where new arrivals seek to join it.

The difficulty in understanding such relationships is that migrant networks that have become criminalised are particularly difficult to penetrate from a research perspective. Interviewees have multiple vulnerabilities, from local law enforcement authorities to their own 'crime boss' and local criminal protectors.<sup>81</sup> There is also little law enforcement, court case or media reporting, as such arrangements are seldom, if ever, the subject of prosecution. They are thus difficult for outsiders to penetrate and understand.

The franchisee arrangement is shaped by four criteria: the first is that the new arrivals are aware, through information that they have back home, of a criminal network operating in a different location. The second is that they have few resources of their own on arrival, and so have little immediate financial leverage to bargain with the existing network.

The third factor is competition among new arrivals for access to the criminal network, upping the requirements that already well-placed crime bosses may request. Finally, entering the network externally may require an explicit criminal act – usually accepting identity papers through a corrupt process – and this greatly increases local vulnerability and thus reliance on the crime boss.<sup>82</sup>

With the franchisee typology, a foreign criminal network or group must already exist. Franchisees are effectively seeking to buy into an illegal business that is already under way, but on terms that generally benefit the existing network, the 'franchiser'. This form of criminal network building has been noted in other contexts. It also appears to characterise how offshore Nigerian, Congolese and Tanzanian networks were developed.

As the UN Office on Drugs and Crime notes, smugglers, and presumably other criminal groups, may recruit for their criminal activities among both local and migrant communities, with their illegal activity having an impact along the routes where they may operate.<sup>83</sup>

The example of the recruitment of Pakistani nationals into local criminal networks in South Africa suggests, unlike the other typologies, a higher level of coercion facing those entering the network. Payment is required and conditions under which people work are poor. From the perspective of the criminal boss, recruits allow the network and the business to grow, while extracting money from the individuals who make up that network.

## 4. Local criminal cooperation

Earlier in the paper, a triangle of criminal cooperation was presented (Chart 5), illustrating how incoming criminal actors seeking transplantation and embedment need to find a way to work with local criminal actors. It is worth noting here that one of Varese's conditions for successful transplantation in the case of mafia groups is the absence of any other mafia group in the same local criminal market.<sup>84</sup> This applies to varying degrees in two of the case studies here.

The Chinese groups in East Africa displaced another Chinese network in the illicit ivory trade but they didn't have to compete with any locally based trafficking groups. Rather, they empowered a local network of poachers and facilitators. Likewise, the Latin Americans didn't need to compete with local criminal entrepreneurs in Guinea-Bissau, but cooperated extensively with them, strengthening them in the process.

In the case of both Krejcir and the Pakistani networks, there were already extensive criminal networks present in the environment. Krejcir's strategy was to buy them in or compete with them, including killing some in order to counter threats and open new business opportunities. The Pakistani networks, in contrast, particularly those in Cape Town, with its tight formation of mafia-like criminal gangs, sought cooperation. That came in the form of paying protection fees, the cost of which is passed on to incoming members of the expanding network.

It is clear then that the Pakistani networks operate under the protection of local criminal actors and express some nervousness in disrupting the arrangement, a sign of their vulnerability, although one that may decline over long periods of residence.

Breaking or weakening the local system of criminal competition or protection may well in the end be a numbers game. The greater the network size and geographic spread, the more resilient it will be. The need for protection will also vary: it is required in Cape Town, for example, but there is less of a need for protection in the more open and free-wheeling criminal environment of Johannesburg. It may be for this reason that Pakistani groups are more visible, and more involved in open violence in Johannesburg

than in Cape Town, where they have an extensive but more concealed presence.

## 5. Protection: wide or deep?

The triangle of criminal relationships presented earlier also points to the need for incoming criminal actors to seek some accommodation with the state, either at the political or institutional level. All four of the case studies – and therefore all of the typologies in the matrix – show how criminal groups view such outreach as critical to their operations.

In several instances, interviews and court transcripts also underscore how incoming criminals viewed Africa as particularly promising, in the sense that local political and security actors were seen as corruptible. The clearest case of this is the Latin American traffickers, who saw an opportunity in Guinea-Bissau because they could buy political and security protection for their activities. While they bedded down quickly, it is likely that they were acutely aware that should this protection fade, their position would become rapidly insecure.

Breaking or weakening the local system of criminal competition or protection may well in the end be a numbers game

Ironically perhaps, the protection system in Guinea-Bissau faded not because the Latin Americans couldn't pay, but because their protection system, the country's military and political leaders, wanted to generate greater profits by moving upstream in the market. They wanted to control the purchase and movement of cocaine, rather than just the protection of the trade, to ensure higher profits.

Lacking the necessary contacts and experience, they failed. One of their weaknesses was that they weren't able to judge how their search for new opportunities would make them vulnerable to the DEA entrapment operation.

For the Latin Americans, it was a cautionary tale. A permanent outpost on the West African coast was only possible with the cooperation of local elites, whose

motives were often fickle. By 2019-20, a new system of cocaine trafficking seemed to be occurring without a Latin American presence, with local criminal entrepreneurs having moved more securely into position.<sup>85</sup>

The example of the Latin Americans in Guinea-Bissau should be a salutary one for the criminal class. A recording read out in court in New York in 2015 revealed the Latin Americans boasting about their protection system and how it went to the very top. That is precisely what made Guinea-Bissau attractive, they suggested: they owned the place because they had the top echelons of government in their pockets.

## A permanent outpost on the West African coast was only possible with the cooperation of local elites

But they didn't. The relationship with the protectors proved unstable, subject to the vicissitudes of ever-changing local politics. By mapping out the actors who needed to be paid on their whiteboard, the traffickers demonstrated some understanding of this. But they nevertheless overestimated their security.<sup>86</sup>

Krejcir did the same. He may have bought the most senior provincial (and probably national) police crime intelligence officers, which increased his confidence, but he didn't have foolproof protection. When he could no longer pay, and media scrutiny became too intense, his system of protection evaporated and he found himself behind bars.

The Chinese and Pakistani networks' system of protection appears to have been at a lower level and broader: local police, customs officials and other bureaucrats were in their pockets. There is no evidence in either case of payoffs made to senior police or political office holders. Under the circumstances, this approach – even if perhaps it is the case that they could not reach more powerful people in the protection system – proved more resilient. Parts of the protection system could fall away but could be replaced. It covered only what was needed to carry out their business. And it was not visible – more a case of smaller, regular bribes than larger higher-level payments.

## Conclusions: what makes successful embedment?

Each of the typologies and case studies occurred in different contexts, and although in two cases transplantation was ultimately not possible or was problematic, even then the impact of the criminal activities was high. Krejcir murdered numerous people, and the drug pipeline through West Africa continues to flow. This suggests that earlier interventions to address these activities would have made an important difference.

So what can we learn in terms of meaningful responses?

In the case of Krejcir and the Latin Americans in West Africa, the role of media coverage should be underscored. In both cases, high-level political and/or security protection meant state actions were constrained. Independent media coverage ensured, however, that the stories did not go away, prompting protests, appeals for assistance to external parties, and ultimately the exposure of the protection system.

Exposure by the EIA and external help from China were also important in bringing down the Yang Fenglan network and the Shuidong syndicate in Tanzania.

Despite these failings (or because of them), the typologies and the case studies illustrate what may be the guiding principles for understanding how successful long-term criminal transplantation, embedment and growth may occur. These can be summarised as follows:

- Slow embedment: Starting with very little is possible provided it is combined with acquiring local experience, including language skills and local networks. This may be a better long-term strategy than rapid and higher-profile growth.
- Avoiding unnecessary displays of wealth: There is no need to flash money around – it attracts unnecessary attention. While in the short term handing out cash brings allies, in the long term these are relationships that will not last if the funds run dry.
- Assumptions about the success of high-level state protection may be wrong: Buy security from a diverse group of actors and keep the focus on the immediate needs of facilitating criminal business.
- Understand the local criminal context: Seek working relationships with local criminal groups, serve their needs but also understand your place. Break out of local protection systems in places where that is possible and local criminal groups are less mafia-like or thin on the ground.

- Incremental and controlled expansion: Grow slowly and steadily using a network expansion approach, ensuring loyalty through ethnic ties and a healthy dose of coercion.

Foreign criminal actors or networks following these guiding principles, which closely align with the strategies of the fortune seeker, and even more the franchisee model, will probably find the most expeditious route to long-term and successful criminal embedment.

So, given this understanding of what constitutes a successful strategy for the foreign criminal entrepreneur, how can the state and society counter such modes of criminal venture and expansionism?

For networked criminal operations, integrity in law enforcement is of course a critical component. The Yang case illustrates as much. But so is international cooperation. Reducing corruption in the ordinary operation of state business (i.e. ports, customs, police, park rangers) is also clearly a requirement. Understanding more effectively how licit business acts as a cover for illicit activities, including through the laundering of funds, is also a priority.

The case of the two Chinese criminal networks also suggests the importance of creating critical voices within diaspora and expatriate business communities in Africa. The implicit conclusion from court testimony in the Yang case is that her activities were relatively well understood in these circles. Yet she continued for years without interference. A rethink of how to engage with this constituency is therefore required.

A closer look at the franchisee typology exemplified by the Pakistani case study suggests a key area to target, namely disrupting the ability of the network to recruit new members. Varese's study also points in this direction, suggesting that the 'supply of mafiosi' was a critical defining feature.

As the Pakistanis' requests to local South African gangsters to kill their boss suggests, the cruelty and coercion that runs through the franchisee system may lie at the heart of its dismantling. If new arrivals can be identified early, incentivised away from network recruitment, and not immediately criminalised, the franchisee model will die on the vine. Better strategic responses and closer integration of state actions are prerequisites to achieve this. This applies not only in our Pakistani example, but also in numerous other cases, including most notably the growth of Nigerian criminal networks.

If the case studies are examined closely, it is safe to say that the globalisation of crime – and Africa's integration into the global criminal economy – is not a strategic and clearly determined process. It is a messy one that involves multiple actors and networks driven by a variety of market incentives (not to mention human ego and vaulting ambition).

Countering the damage caused by the growth of global illicit markets, and the actors who manage them, requires clearer thinking on the connections between the local and the global criminal networks, as well as a more active engagement by the research community in an often difficult and sensitive area.

## Notes

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- 12 The correlation between foreign actors and criminal markets is 0.56. That is to say, a higher prevalence of foreign criminal actors is associated with greater pervasiveness of criminal markets, and vice versa.
- 13 Globally, the correlation between foreign actors and criminal markets is 0.42.
- 14 In Africa, the correlation between foreign actors and fauna crimes is 0.66.
- 15 Globally, the correlation between actors and fauna crimes is 0.30.
- 16 As is clear from the footnotes in the various case studies, I have been attempting to understand this issue for several years. Discussions with others have not always been focused on or directed at these specific criteria but they have come up regularly enough for me to believe they are of significance.
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## POLICY BRIEF



**Sandalwood trafficking in Kenya**  
Deforestation and the exploitation of local communities

Issue 22 | March 2012

**Summary**

Sandalwood trafficking in Kenya is a trans-national illegal trade that exploits local communities and leads to deforestation. The illegal trade in sandalwood has been addressed by a number of actions from the community level to international markets. This has resulted in the degradation of community forests and has placed the sandalwood trade at risk of becoming illegal. Local, and up-convoy action in this criminal network continue to erode information. While this response to prevent sandalwood in the wild is being done, the Kenya Forest Service (KFS) in the Forest Conservation and Management Act No. 24 of 2006 has enabled the prosecution of sandalwood trafficking cases through the Wildlife Conservation and Management Act of 2011. The confusion that has emerged from the lack of clarity on enforcement practices has inhibited sandalwood traffickers when apprehended. Recent African Court of Justice ruling in an African Commission case, has further facilitated the prosecution of Kenyan sandalwood smuggled into Uganda and Tanzania.

**Key findings**

- Sandalwood trafficking is an environmental crime that leads to a loss of biodiversity, which has a negative impact on the ability of communities to produce enough food to ensure their livelihoods.
- Women seem to control the sandalwood trafficking network in Samburu County, and as harassers at the community level and then as the leaders coordinating dialogue between local communities, police officers and other members of state agencies.
- Sandalwood trafficking in Kenya seems to rely on state officials who possess this organized crime. Assess.
- A multi-agency approach to tackling sandalwood trafficking has had some success since 2003 and should be continued.
- Through the support of state and community agencies, sandalwood cases can be prosecuted in order to utilize their sustainable financing and the commercialization of the trade in sandalwood.

## RESEARCH PAPER



Issue 23 | November 2012

## Constructing crime

### Risks, vulnerabilities and opportunities in Africa's communications infrastructure

Assess. Wiping out risks to Africa

**Summary**

While Africa's growing communications infrastructures and increasing internet penetration offer significant developmental benefits, they offer parallel opportunities to organized crime, which exploit the continent's enhanced connectivity. These opportunities are likely to grow with related research already indicating that the continent is an increasingly important source of both cyber-dependent and cyber-enabled crime. It is crucial and already largely necessary to take stock of how these opportunities relate, and how they can be addressed. If this research is applied, unregulated, unpermitted crime will increasingly undermine progress and development, compromising the achievements of the very goals that enhanced infrastructure seeks to achieve.

**Key findings**

- White Africa's growing communications infrastructures and the increases in internet penetration offer significant developmental benefits, they offer parallel opportunities to organized crime, which exploit the continent's enhanced connectivity. These opportunities are likely to grow with related research already indicating that the continent is an increasingly important source of both cyber-dependent and cyber-enabled crime. It is crucial and already largely necessary to take stock of how these opportunities relate, and how they can be addressed. If this research is applied, unregulated, unpermitted crime will increasingly undermine progress and development, compromising the achievements of the very goals that enhanced infrastructure seeks to achieve.
- The telecommunication and digital sectors are vastly under-regulated, and many countries lack the capacity to regulate or prosecute cyber crime.
- Cyber criminals are increasingly using the web to engage in organized, emerging, highly-visible technologies and demonstrating increasingly sophisticated techniques.
- Africa's financial services sector is continually targeted by criminals wanting the sector's resources on communications infrastructure. Mobile money is particularly vulnerable as criminal enterprises and is widely used to conduct criminal profits.
- The presence of counterfeit hardware and software, with high-profile vulnerabilities to hacking, presents a key vulnerability in countries where the consequences matter is significant.
- The recent spread of Internet of Things (IoT) devices across Africa, which is predicted to accelerate, presents a significant and increasing vulnerability to organized crime.

## RESEARCH PAPER



Issue 24 | September 2012

## point of view.

## Corruption

### Lack of integrity or

**Whose conflict is it anyway?**  
Addressing conflicts of interest in South Africa's public sector

By Arnold Chetty

**Summary**

Conflicts of interest are important rather than alien, as such, they do not necessarily compromise an individual's judgement. It is unmanaged and unregulated conflicts of interest that present real risks in corruption. The conflict-corruption scenario reported in the media on a daily basis are often manifestations of conflicts of interest which are unmanaged and unregulated.

Against this background, this paper discusses the nature of conflicts of interest and argues that similarly to corruption, conflicts of interest cannot be eradicated. Rather, these conflicts should be managed and regulated. An effective conflict of interest system is crucial as you only manage these conflicts, but also as a preventative and corrective tool.

**Key findings**

- An easy challenge is that lack of understanding by those involved of what constitutes a conflict of interest and how to address it.
- An efficient system to monitor possible conflicts of interest is required in the public sector. Even when legislation and regulations prohibit conflict of interest, the controls necessary to manage conflicts are missing and enterprises are at risk.
- Adapting new technology, such as e-tools from, can streamline and manage conflict of interest management of conflicts of interest successfully in the public sector.
- Conflicts of interest cannot be eradicated but with clear policies on disclosure, monitoring and enforcement when can be managed.

## POLICY BRIEF



Issue 25 | October 2012

## West Africa's warning flares?

### Rethinking the significance of cocaine seizures

By Arnold Chetty

**Summary**

Cocaine seizures are widely reported in the media and academic reporting on drug trafficking and organized crime. Everyone knows about seizures, but what do seizures represent the exact opposite of what we generally think them to be? That is, not a reflection of state effectiveness, but rather costs in terms of political perception. If that is the case, they may appear more regularly at certain times rather than others. A detailed study of West African cocaine seizures in the context of periods of political stability over a twenty-year period suggests this perception is worth exploring.

**Key findings**

- Drug seizures in West Africa have been concentrated in key periods (2003-05/12) and more lately in the period from 2010/11 with a lull in 2010/11 between.
- At a regional level, seizures of cocaine correlated with periods of declining political stability while declines in seizures occur during periods of political stability.
- This relationship can also be seen in countries with cycles of conflict and instability, namely Sierra Leone and Mali. Notably, seizures occur in the period just before instability increases.
- As there is strong evidence of political pressure over the drug trafficking economy in the region, seizures in recent years appear to occur when political pressure is put in place.
- Drug seizures in West Africa are a reflection of a complex and low-level of seizure. This is a reflection of a strong and loose law system of criminal conviction, carry the outcome of the fact that most illicit profits are generated outside the drug market.
- This suggests that seizures does not appear to be a reflection of changes in the political economy, if so, they may serve as 'warning flares' of pending political instability.



## About the author

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## About ENACT

ENACT builds knowledge and skills to enhance Africa's response to transnational organised crime. ENACT analyses how organised crime affects stability, governance, the rule of law and development in Africa, and works to mitigate its impact. ENACT is implemented by the ISS and INTERPOL, in affiliation with the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime.

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